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CPYRGTHE GREAT IF

The deputy chief of the United States Intelligence Agency, in Columbia Wednesday to deliver his first on-the-record speech in almost four years, said he believes the Russians are not yet ready to risk a major war.

He then introduced a series of "ifs" and "however," and that is the thing that worries a great many people. The Berlin crisis constitutes the major "if." According to Deputy Chief Robert Amory, Jr., the Russians think they hold the trump cards in that situation, and that the United States will back down.

If the United States refuses to back down, thinking the Russians will, trouble could come quickly. Amory, in a position to learn many facts kept from the public, did not dismiss the possibility of our stumbling into a war because of the ticklish situation created by Russian demands for a "free" Berlin.

President Eisenhower Wednesday disclosed how seriously he regards the Berlin crisis by hinting that our Air Force might go on a 24-hour alert until the situation eases—or war begins. The President's statement does not contradict what Amory told his Columbia audience. It does, however, seem to indicate a growing concern that Khrushchev may be playing a kind of diplomatic Russian roulette with the peace of the world.

Amory was no doubt correct in saying the communists are not yet ready for a major nuclear war. He was probably equally correct in intimating Khrushchev would also like to kick the United States in the seat of its Berlin trousers. The danger is that his desire to kick may overpower his more reasonable conclusion as to his nation's unreadiness.